

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF  
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS  
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR: FRANK M. GARDNER  
Willesden Public Libraries)

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## The Library Assistant ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE next meeting of the Association will be on 7th November, at 6.30 p.m. The venue will be the Leytonstone Branch Library, the latest library building in the Home Counties, and one which, by reason of its modern planning and decoration, no librarian or assistant should neglect to visit. The meeting will take the form of a debate, and Mr. F. M. Gardner (Willesden) will propose "That public libraries are unnecessary." He will be opposed by Mr. T. I. M. Clulow (Kingston). The Mayor of Leyton will welcome members, and the Chairman of the Libraries Committee, Alderman J. A. Allanson, J.P., will preside.

This will be a joint meeting with the London and Home Counties Branch, and will be the first visit paid to Leyton by the Association. We naturally hope for a record attendance. The best route to Leytonstone is by train from Liverpool Street.

Social events for the month are as follows :

14th November.—Cinema programme prepared by the staff of St. Marylebone Public Library. 8 p.m.

21st November.—Whist drive, 8 p.m.

28th November.—Debate : "That librarians should marry librarians."

*Proposer*, Mr. A. T. Austing ; *Opposer*, Mr. S. Snaith.

All these events are at Chaucer House. We also would draw the attention of members to the fact that, in support of the policy of making Chaucer House a real meeting-place for all members, it has now been arranged that luncheon and tea are provided regularly at very moderate prices. The continuance of these facilities depends entirely on the support given by members, so it is hoped that full advantage will be taken of this opportunity, not only for its intrinsic value, but as a means of getting to know a wider circle of professional colleagues.

The Inaugural Meeting at the London School of Economics will be remembered for some time by those present. Miss Helen Simpson surpassed our greatest expectations, and gave a really delightful talk on the thesis that the letter is the only feminine contribution to literature which is unique. Not only did she give us extracts from correspondence previously unknown to

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most of us, but she gave what was in effect an essay on feminine psychology. Her talk will be reproduced in the next issue, and we feel sure that members who were not there (and there were many of them) will then regret their absence.

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It is rumoured that many candidates at Library Association examinations are viewing the forthcoming test with some apprehension. We have had prepared some cyclostyled copies of a collection of "Notes for classification students," compiled by Mr. W. H. Phillips, one of the best-known tutors in classification, which should be extremely useful. Copies may be obtained on sending 3d. in stamps to Mr. S. W. Martin, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, S.E.24.

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### *Library Association Council. Annual Election.*

Voting papers will be issued on Wednesday, 14th November, 1934.

No voting papers will be sent to members whose subscriptions were not paid on or before 1st July, 1934.

If a qualified member does not receive a voting paper he must apply to the Secretary of the Library Association before 20th November, 1934. Transitional members must send the receipt for their subscription when making claims.

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A joint meeting has been arranged for 21st November between members of the North-Western Branch of the Library Association, members of the A.A.L., the Manchester Fellowship, and A.S.L.I.B., at the Manchester Central Library. Tea at 4.30 will be followed by a lantern lecture by Mr. Charles Nowell, Chief Librarian, and by an inspection of the building.

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An oral class in librarianship has recently been formed at the Leeds College of Commerce. The Yorkshire Division of the Association of Assistant Librarians suggested that oral classes were required in Yorkshire and circularized the libraries in its area. As a result of the response to this circular Mr. R. J. Gordon was asked by the Division if he would start a class in Leeds for the Intermediate section for assistants in the Leeds district. With the co-operation of the Education Committee and of Dr. G. H. Austin, Principal of the Leeds College of Commerce, the class was formed, and held its first meeting at the beginning of the Christmas term, with students from Leeds, Hudders-

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field, Heckmondwike, and Castleford. The class is graded for Board of Education grant purposes, with other professional courses, as an advanced evening class (the class is actually held on Tuesday mornings). The students pay normal advanced evening class fees, and the tutors are paid by the College. The tutors—Mr. J. T. Gillett, F.L.A. (Classification) and Mr. E. O. Reed, F.L.A. (Cataloguing)—are both members of the Leeds Public Libraries staff.

The class is an experiment and has been well supported by assistants. If the experiment is successful, the class will continue in succeeding years, and classes in other sections of the syllabus will be formed.

### COMPETITION

As previously announced, the Council of the A.A.L. invite members to submit papers entitled *County libraries in 1950*. The essays should be a forecast of the county library system fifteen years hence, should show practical applications of future policy, and should be 3-4,000 words long. If possible they should be typewritten and must be submitted not later than 30th December, 1934, to W. C. P. Pugsley, Chadwell Heath Library, Romford. The successful competitor will be asked to read the paper at the meeting of the Section at Hayes on 8th May, 1935.

## BOOK SELECTION VERSUS TOLERANCE

JOHN FAGAN

PUBLIC opinion is set in motion more often than not by the pseudo-scholar exploiting a catchword. This is a fact of social psychology, and the reason for it, no doubt, is the existence of large classes who like to be looked on as "thinking men," but will not take the trouble to think. Among such people, intellectual fashions change as quickly as Parisian dress designs. A hundred years ago, our serious, clear-headed citizen shouted "no popery" to prove his worth; to-day, he is equally sure that everything in this world (and the next) must be regarded with "tolerance." Such an enlightenment is worth noting, and particularly the way in which it falls on the library world.

To understand the Englishman's mind to-day, we must see that he is, above all, aimless and unhappy. A number of factors have brought this about, but

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one of the strongest reasons and the one which concerns us here is this : His self-made prison of State protestantism is mouldering into ruin, and our Englishman is stepping out into freedom a spiritual pauper. His religious development remains at the point where the Reformation cut it short, four hundred years ago ; and superstition, masquerading as science or good comradeship, comes home to fill the empty places. Anything is welcome ; poor innocent ! he thinks he is tolerant, but really he is tragically undecided.

"Tolerance" has found its way into public libraries, influencing particularly the methods by which religious books are chosen. How librarians have followed the crowd, and have mistaken empty-headedness for broad-mindedness, is best shown by an illustration. This is, of course, purely imaginative, but the truth of the parallel remains.

Assume that a science library board engages a librarian ; he is qualified, and everyone is assured that he will be efficient ; now imagine him practising the kind of selection that is generally used for religious books. If you examine his stock six months later, you will find that money and time have admittedly been spent on it . . . but how ? There are only a handful of works which can be relied on, while yards of shelving space is given over to an exhibition in which cranks, fools, and amateurs are all outstanding. Flat Earthers and Geocentrics have decked themselves out in flimsy strips of astro-physics. Senior wranglers have written treatises which square the circle to (their own) satisfaction. A woman's best-seller novelist is the standard authority on Quantum physics. Finally, a biologist has settled the mutation of species without referring to one concrete fact.

"Broad-minded" persons with a dislike for dogma (perhaps they mean exactness) reply that, although in science such confusion is a scandal, the religious field is open to all comers and all methods. They cannot grasp the simple fact that knowledge without rules is nonsense ; they are too blind even to see the havoc already caused when fancifulness is passed off as originality and scholarship. We can see this for ourselves, by looking at some of the heads in Dewey's 200 class, where books are most heavily concentrated :

- (i) Natural theology, etc. ;
- (ii) Christ and Christianity ;
- (iii) Christian social principles.

(i) Natural theology has almost ceased to be the province of the theologian ; the scientist has taken it over, and is working at high speed. The librarian has to keep up at all costs with modern "thought," and where "tolerance" is the order of the day, there is clearly no time for selectivity. Results work out in a

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very odd fashion, which will repay sketching. A fair amount of space is taken up by the wise men, e.g. Messrs. Lenba, McCabe, and others (who have conscripted Behaviourism, Evolution, and Kant), saying that there is no God; after all a mere fool said this about 1000 B.C. Others are reshaping God and religion to fit in with the final conclusions of an Einstein or a Freud. These gentlemen are no doubt too busy with Physics and Psychology to alter natural laws or cancel them. Following these works is usually a fairly large collection showing what obstacles the "churches" have placed in the path of scientific progress.

We should expect to find that such books as these are matched by their equally scholarly opposites. St. Thomas Aquinas, one of history's acutest thinkers, Bellarmine, the first-rate work of the English Jesuits at Stonyhurst are nearly all absent. If we have Pringle-Pattison's *Idea of God*, Professor Grensted and Dr. Inge on psychology and faith, Bishop Barnes and his friends on *Scientific theory and religion*, scientists like Eddington and Hobhouse delivering professedly theological lectures like the Gifford series, then we should have an effective countering force, i.e. balance of thought. Father D'Arcy's *Nature of belief* is a masterpiece of reasoning and analysis (so even the modernists affirm). The Abbé Moreux's *Modern science and the truths beyond* and Rudolf Allier's *Modern psychologies* show, if they do nothing else, that the Catholic mind is not a dead-weight left from the Middle Ages: it can probe the present day's philosophical and scientific muddle with as much judgment as any other. As for the conflict of the "churches" and science, I can only say that I have no brief for these organizations: they have done many strange things during their short lives. But, I can affirm that there is only one synthesis in which anthropology, geology, and the other sciences hold an orderly place — Catholic philosophy or scholasticism.

Sir Bertram Windle, in his *Church and science*, clearly shows the respective spheres of religion and science, and explodes the stock charges made against the Church—obscurantism, etc. Again, in his *Theonas*, M. Maritain applies Thomistic wisdom to the problems raised by modern thought. But no one sees that this is of much use. The angel of the schools and his following have been much ridiculed lately: they are "narrow" and "mediæval"; but who troubles to find out if their principles are still valid? Applying this logic, we banish Newton from the textbooks at once: he formulated his laws three hundred years ago!

(ii) Modernist mists have gathered nowhere more thickly than round the

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person of Christ. He is the object either of drivelling sentiment or gross distortion. Every student with a little Greek or Latin is qualified to twist the life and teaching of the greatest man who ever lived to fit his own whims. In any other sphere such blundering would be ridiculed to death, but here it is "marked by profound insight," etc. No doubt such works may be needed and should be available, if they are. But, assume we have a representative selection of good, sound "non-sectarian" books; assume that we find a place for, e.g. *Did Jesus ever live*, for Robertson's *Jesus of history*, Stanley Jones, Raven's *Jesus and the gospel of love*, Grensted's *Person of Christ*; what kind of a Christology have we? If we are faced with a phantom, a demagogue, a product of his times, an amiable moralist or stoic, can we ignore the Son of God? After all, Christian thought is not, as many think, co-terminous with false liberalism.

Yet, in spite of this, in what "tolerant selection" is justice done to *Christ and His critics*, to Adam's *Son of God*, or Lagrange's *Christ and Renan*. In how many is there a place for Grandmaison's *Jesus-Christ*, generally admitted to be in the first order of scholarship? One in ten, perhaps, or less.

If the "scholars" have treated Christ according to their own notions, Christianity has fared even worse than its Founder. There is a weary parade of books all having similar themes running through them. A wedge of varying size is driven in between Christ and Christianity; and the gap, once made, is bridged as the scholar sees best. Dogmas, sacraments, liturgies have all been added to Christ's "simple" teaching; the work of the creative community, spiritual needs, or some consciousness. Finally, there will soon be a golden age when there will be no more dogma and no more "churches."

Sometimes we catch a glimpse of Hughe's *History of the church* or Adam's *Spirit of Catholicism*. Likewise with Père de la Taille's *Mystery of faith and human opinion*, a work of the profoundist and most orthodox scholarship, which is perhaps the best study of the Mass yet written, with Father Joyce's *Christian marriage*, or with Abbott Butler's *Religion of authority, and of the spirit*. Generally speaking, the selector's view is bounded by the limits of modernism: "tolerance" should make room for a few of the scholars who can beat it on its own ground.

(iii) Division 260 is often a riot of colourful imagination: the building of Utopias is a project which needs no rules and little trouble. Here we find a large number of symposiums in which the "churches" put their heads together to reform the world. The first necessity is as usual to get rid of dogmas;

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and in the next hundred or so pages, we have an ideal state built on moderately puritan Sunday observance and the genteel use of contraceptives. Witness the strange pronouncements in such a typical book as *Christianity and the crisis*, or the airy sociology of "Dick" and "Pat."

False tolerance such as this springs nearly always from ignorance of real issues. Scarcely a book will be found which has a solid base of Christian sociology. To be brief, let us list seven books: Dawson's *Christianity and the new age*; Berdyaev's *Christianity and the class war*; Wust's *Crisis in the west*; Gurian's *Bolshevism*; Berdoyère on the *Drift of democracy*; Schmidt's *Necessity of politics*; and Franciscus Stratmann's *Church and war*. The fundamental difference between these works and those usually found in libraries, is that they apply principles instead of airing views. Yet scholarly as they are, how often are they found in our happy-go-lucky selections? Naturally no one expects Encyclicals: they are "sectarian," and besides, they have a liking for hard facts.

This is not a piece of propaganda. I have only tried to show with positive illustrations that in one branch of book selection librarians usually fail. They have next to no basic principles, and as a result, in a well-meant effort to be non-sectarian, they have taken a section of modern religious thought for its full content. Naturally, they pass over important books—a great many of them Catholic books. What I stress is just this. The selection of religious books should be guided by the same principles as any other selection. Here a good book is inevitably an orthodox one; not dead, but sound. If there is a line of demarcation between the reliable and unreliable in other studies, why should it not be observed here? This done, our quarrel automatically ends.

Talk of public libraries fostering culture frequently descends to the level of cant. It will certainly remain there unless the libraries take their part in the greatest task of education; that is, to replace the exploded shams strewn around on every side. The talked-of new order will never be built without materials; and these will never be found while pseudo-scholarship and singular opinions are served up in the name of tolerance.



## VALUATIONS

T. E. CALLANDER

TOUCHING this matter of laurels. Rosa Dartle is a little confused. Excusably so, for I should perhaps have made it clear that we dispensers of laurels recognize several species of the genus. There is the laurel *emeritus* proudly worn at a sedate angle by those responsible for such notable publications as emanate from Bristol, Leeds, Rugby, and Hendon. There is again the laurel consolatory, a smaller but tasteful model awarded to those librarians who, striving against odds, produce a bulletin of merit if not of brilliance. And there is the laurel derisory, worn slightly askew and with a leaf or two missing. Rosa Dartle will take my meaning.

And so to business. Encouraged, Altrincham has sent me the September issue of *The Altrincham monthly circular*. Again it contains no list of books. Instead, a series of fond messages to Altrincham readers from Mesdames Ruby M. Ayres and Margaret Pedler and Messrs. A. S. Hales and George Goodchild. I want to be quite fair, and to avoid any injustice, but frankly I do not see the point of devoting space in the official journal of a public library to publicizing these authors. I know the arguments in support of their inclusion in the stock of a public library. People cannot all have a cultivated taste and the public library must cater for all tastes; from these authors readers are led on to better things; they may not be clever, but thank God they are clean, and so on. Even if all this is true, and one must stock blood and mush, why advertise it? Are there no other authors whose message might help the leading-on process a little more? As I say, I like to be fair, and I should like to hear from Altrincham about its Bulletin, and to know what is the point about all this that eludes me.

Ever since a reference to book selection, as evidenced by a library bulletin, gave rise to the finest to-do THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT has ever known, the authors of *Valuations* have been cautious to a degree. I have been no exception, and my caution has been reinforced by a poor memory for publication dates in conjunction with a habit of writing these notes away from reference catalogues. But looking through the *Bulletin* of the Burton-upon-Trent Public Library I am encouraged to enter the lists. Fourteen inches of space are devoted to a list headed "A Selection of Fiction recently added." Of these fourteen inches, nine are devoted to the headings "Adventure and western stories," "Love and romance," and "Mystery stories and thrillers." But

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let that pass, and let us examine the two inches devoted to "More serious novels." There we learn that Burton-upon-Trent has recently added *Point counterpoint*, David Garnett's *Go she must*, *Antic hay*, and *Jenny Gerhardt*. One should add that a list of non-fiction in the same bulletin is commendably up-to-date, but surely the books I have mentioned should have been introduced to Burton-upon-Trent a little earlier. Or can it be that what Bloomsbury thinks to-day, Burton will think in 1940, public opinion there being at present just ready to accept Aldous Huxley?

One does not usually look to *More books*, the bulletin of the Boston Public Library, for thrills. It is a scholarly and austere publication which commands our respect and awe rather than solicits our approval. But scratch a scholar, and who knows what may be revealed under his learned epidermis. Somebody has been scratched at Boston. The wound has been brought to their notice by the publication of *An Enquiry into the nature of certain nineteenth-century pamphlets*. There is no need here to recapitulate the tale of woe set out in that exciting book. Its appearance has caused *More books* to come down from the pedestal and head a middle article "The biggest fraud in the history of book collecting." There follows a masterly and restrained discussion of the implications of the *Enquiry*. Restrained though it may be, it is at pains to make it quite clear that, whatever is believed by English bibliographers to be the truth about the foisting upon the book world of forged pamphlets, Boston is in no doubt at all as to where the responsibility lies. A certain vagueness as to the workings of the law of libel impels me to refrain from quoting the article, but I would recommend it to the attention of all bibliographers.

Leyton sends an attractive pamphlet, giving a selection from additions to its Leytonstone Branch. It contains also a brief description of this most notable addition to London's public library buildings. Buildings as such are usually outside the scope of this article, but I would here draw the attention of all London assistants to this excellent library, and would suggest to provincial librarians visiting London that they will be most amply rewarded for taking the rather unattractive road to Leyton.

This is the season when the lecture lists are upon us—though is it my imagination that they seem to get fewer every year? Leeds, Liverpool, Cheltenham, and Woolwich are the most noticeable ones on my desk at the moment, though Woolwich is confining lecture activities to schoolchildren and placating disappointed adults with films, a most laudable decision, especially when the films include such items of note as *Drifters*. Leeds has again used the

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all-conquering Gill sans for its list, and Liverpool and Woolwich have followed suit, the result being three very good-looking productions. Cheltenham is more conservative, but is not blind to the uses of white space. A change, too, has come over the lectures listed. There are more topical subjects, and less of the "Off the beaten track in Andorra" type. More well-known names, and fewer earnest clergymen and school teachers. (The public-speaking proclivities of clergymen and school teachers is a matter for the student of conditioned reflexes). Leeds has two celebrities in J. B. S. Haldane and St. John Ervine, while celebrities are as pips in a pomegranate at Liverpool. H. C. Armstrong, A. F. Tschiffely, John Gibbons—I pick these out at random. It is almost enough to make me conquer my inborn prejudice against lectures.

## THE ASSISTANT IN CHARGE OF MANUSCRIPTS

MARY WALTON

IT is not my intention to deal here with the reasons why public libraries should, or should not, collect manuscripts and local records. That is another story. As is so often the case, fact is more clamorous for attention than theory, and the facts are that libraries do collect manuscripts, and that in any library with a conscience they must be dealt with. It follows that somebody must know how to deal with them.

Nowadays any library which has manuscripts at all should have some member of the staff competent, and with the time, to devote at least part of his duties to their care, and a largish library, especially if it is a recognized repository, needs a whole-time assistant. The department, compared with the whole library service, is indeed a small one, but it needs a staff of its own for two reasons. One is that the care of documents is a profession in itself, which requires special knowledge and training; the other is that the work involved is, physically, sufficient to keep one person thoroughly occupied. The modest tin box which comes from a local solicitor or lord of the manor may prove to contain, when everything has been unfolded and sorted, several hundred separate items, each of which needs careful cataloguing, cleaning, numbering, and probably mending; and once it is known that collections will be properly dealt with, tin boxes begin to arrive at an alarming and unexpected rate, in threes at a time.

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I believe that in most cases somebody already on the staff is asked to take over the work; and all I propose to do in this essay is to point out what qualifications and interests the successful keeper of manuscripts should have, and how the necessary training is to be acquired. My knowledge of what has actually been done in most libraries is limited, and it is because I feel that most assistants who do this work are likely to find themselves very much out of touch with their fellow workers that I have written the essay.

Any assistant who feels drawn towards manuscript work should first read the qualifications as set down by Mr. Charles Johnson in *The Care of documents*, by Mr. Hilary Jenkinson in *Archive administration*, and by Dr. Fowler in *The Care of county muniments*. Those who are not really cut out for the work will probably be frightened off immediately. In practice, of course, there are all grades of competence; the ideal archivist, like the ideal librarian, is a person of uncommon parts. To those in whom, as in me, these descriptions produce a stiffening of resolve, I would point out that the five qualities which anyone who hopes to do good work really must have are, knowledge of the business of dealing with documents (first and foremost), interest in the work (just as important), and energy, patience (for much of the work is very dull), and a readiness to encounter dirt when necessary. An intense interest in history and antiquities is not necessary; indeed, it may be prejudicial, for it may make it very difficult to deal with the material absolutely impartially, and it sometimes leads to the "sob-stuff" which zealous librarians prefer to keep out of the profession.

Taking the "moral" qualities first, there should be plenty of choice among people already in the profession; for they may be found in man or woman, graduate or non-graduate. It is a pursuit, thank goodness, in which the argument about the comparative merits of the sexes cannot easily arise. Accuracy, patience, and enthusiasm are characteristics happily not confined to either sex, and there is no more physical work and dirt than the average housewife faces daily. I have always held the opinion that women differ from men, not so much in the quality of their capacities as in their size; that sooner or later there comes a point where the width and bulk of organization is beyond the average woman's handling; and the organization of a local repository never reaches this point. That is to say, I believe that the very highest ranks of the Public Record Office are the only places in archive work which a good woman worker cannot adequately fill.

Though I hesitate to open the subject again, I do think that in this sphere the graduate may justify his existence. There is no complete university course

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in the subject, but a history, classics, or law graduate has a good grounding in one essential subject, and sufficient basis for learning the others easily. The habit of tackling a new subject as a game, and fusing the new knowledge with what he already knows, is a characteristic of the best graduates which is useful in so specialized a subject. On the other hand, there are plenty of archivists who never went to college, and others who graduated in quite different subjects. I refuse to argue further and come to what actually has to be learned.

The way in which most library assistants, and graduates looking for jobs, begin to learn is to take the Palæography and Archive Science paper in the Final Examination of the Library Association, or the course at the London School of Librarianship. After that the provincial struggles for himself. In spite of repeated enquiry, I have not been able to find any other mode of professional training with the exception of a course at the London School of Economics, which takes, I believe, two years, and is therefore out of the question for anyone already in a post. The only thing that the reference library assistant can do is to practise on his own collections and potter about other libraries in the hope of picking up useful hints. The lucky ones may find assistance from more experienced people in their own libraries or from local historians and professors.

All assistants who have ambitions to be competent as keepers of manuscripts (the term archivist, I believe, is not strictly correct in public libraries), must be prepared to work for several years in their own private time. The cataloguing and arranging even of the most modest collections of deeds involves knowledge of administrative history, law, and Latin of a special kind. Now it is not likely that there is any library where assistants have the opportunity to sit on public service swotting conveyancing, and those libraries must be few where the keeper of manuscripts can work happily in his retreat from nine to five daily. He will probably have to do some ordinary reference duties as well, which involves a capacity for switching his mind from one type of cataloguing, classification, and service to another, and a willingness to use his own time until he can really feel he has earned his nightly freedom. His reward will be the increasing speed with which the dirty bundles and untidy bales become trim and numbered packets, and the knowledge that deeds can be found by others even when he is off duty.

The care of documents, however, is not librarianship, and the theory which he learns will conflict with much that he learnt as a junior. A library is a

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living, changing, growing organism, evolving according to its needs and environment, although its small habits may change little; a collection of manuscripts is a dead body, and the laws of document anatomy are as fixed as those of human physiology. Therefore, in librarianship the broad principles are elastic and capable of change, though routine detail is largely repetitive; but in archive science the principles are simple and quite unalterable, while details are complex and require a fresh consideration for each collection according to its size, shape, and nature. A set of title deeds must not be broken up, nor a series of accounts rearranged; but you can rarely house them both, nor even two sets of accounts, in the same way.

The assistant in the average public library, who has passed his examination, dealt with some of his deeds, and made himself thoroughly conversant with the rules of his calling, will probably find himself a trifle lonely when the details come up for decision. Now that the question of record preservation is receiving the attention of more and more librarians and local government authorities, the need for aid and training for the novice in the provinces is becoming urgent. Members of the British Records Association have already put up a plea to that body for guidance for the isolated provincial, and if and when their projected correspondence course and leaflets materialize, *bona-fide* manuscript keepers in public libraries will be able to take advantage of them, and so be spared the groping for information, the horrible fear that their catalogues are full of howlers, which is their lot at present. Even before that time, it should be possible for more communication to take place between them. I myself, in spite of having visited every library in whose neighbourhood I have found myself, am still very much in the dark about the staffing problem, and should be delighted to hear from anybody who has charge of manuscripts in a public library. It is now, thanks to the Institute of Historical Research, comparatively easy to find out what libraries are receiving manuscripts, but it is difficult to know what is being done to make them accessible by cataloguing and arrangement.

The work of preserving records, I think, will always be the task of the larger libraries, and will always be interesting only to a minority of library assistants. But it is a work which needs doing, and which is much more often done than formerly; and I, for one, am eager to know more about the problems of other libraries and the way in which they are met. Particularly do I want to be told anything which I ought to have known all along, and of which I may have betrayed ignorance in this essay. I hasten to add that I know and admire what

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is being done at Birmingham. But Birmingham, which bestrides the narrow Midlands like a Colossus, is not an average public library.

On one thing, I think, everybody is by now agreed; that the assistant who does the work should know how to do it; and anything, be it private communication or public training, which makes that possible should be done.



## ON THE EDITOR'S DESK

*Manchester Central Library : an illustrated record.* (8d. post free.)

*Newcastle Public Library : Fine arts catalogue.* (No price given.)

*On the making of CXXV books : a publisher's bibliography.* (Gerald Howe, 3s. 6d.)

THREE books, all of them very different, but all of them of interest to the librarian. So much ink has already been spilt about the new Manchester library that it would be useless to use more in discussing this commemorative booklet, which is almost as sumptuous as the building it describes. And the building is sumptuous and magnificent. Whatever criticism is made of its design as a library or its design as a building, it is quite certain that for the next fifty years or so, the first thing visitors to Manchester will be shown will be the new Central Library. There are very few libraries in this country of which one can say that.

The *Newcastle Fine arts catalogue* is a large and careful compilation of the type which English libraries were so prolific in producing in the early years of this century. Within its limits, it is a fine and accurate piece of work, but its limits are obvious. It is useful to the art student who wishes to know what is possessed by Newcastle; it is useful as a handy book of reference to a large collection of art books; but it is of no use whatever as a guide, since it falls between the stools of absolute completeness and absolute selectivity. It exhibits that curious unevenness which seems a usual feature of public library reference collections, whether large or small. In the painting section, for instance, there are catalogued two books on Rosa Bonheur, who is of no importance whatsoever, and there is no entry for Delacroix, the signpost to the Impressionists. One sees four books on Millet, but nothing on Manet; eighteen on Raphael, but nothing on Masaccio or Ucello. Why Epstein and not Eric Gill? Why Arnold Haskell's *Sculptor speaks*, and not his *Black on white*? It is easy, of course, to select instances like this, and I intend it, not so much

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as criticism, but as a general exhibition of the difficulties of perfect book selection. It is one thing knowing what books you want ; it is quite another finding them. If even a large reference library like Newcastle fails sometimes (and I would emphasize that this is unquestionably one of the best catalogues of art books I have ever seen), what then must be the difficulties of the small library ? It is a long way back to the librarian who called himself a walking catalogue and disdained aid, and aids to book selection have multiplied in a most gratifying manner in recent years, but it still seems a long way forward to the obvious solution to book selection difficulties—the permanent advisory committee of specialists.

Library assistants who, snowed under by the flood of publishers' autumn catalogues, are wondering why so many books are necessary, will find Garfield Howe's little exposition of the publishers' point of view both interesting and amusing. Publishing becomes, in his hands, not so much a way of making money (though one must live, of course !) as an interesting and intellectual hobby. Mr. Howe has not the invincible optimism which seeks to make every book a best-seller (his nearest approach to securing one was *Grand hotel*, snatched from his hands by "the more enterprising Mr. Geoffrey Bles"), but neither has he the "precious" outlook which leads inevitably to ruin and the production of sumptuous and unreadable limited editions in Japanese vellum. And this, his one hundred and twenty-sixth volume, is one of his most charming ventures. He will not dine at the Savoy on the profits, but it should run to something in Soho. One would like to think that this notice will help.

F. M. G.

## THE DIVISIONS

### MIDLAND DIVISION

**A**N exceedingly animated and well-attended Annual Meeting was held at the new Perry Common Branch of the Birmingham Public Libraries on 26th September, 1934. The size of this meeting, the largest annual gathering for four years, was probably due to the ominously-sounding subject of the impending discussion : "Further amalgamation of the A.A.L. with the L.A." (For "Further" read "Complete" ; this was broken to us during the evening.)

The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for 1933-4 (published in



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the current issue of *Open access*, the Divisional Magazine) having been formally disposed of, Mr. J. Revie, the newly elected Chairman of the Division, then opened the discussion by outlining the history of the A.A.L. from the reasons for its formation as the old A.A.L. to its part-amalgamation as the A.A.L. with the L.A. in 1930.

The amalgamation proposals not having been officially settled, Mr. Revie, as Secretary of the Joint Committee on Amalgamation, had carefully to avoid speaking out of order while yet giving the meeting definite factors in the consideration of a question of such vital importance. Such was our Chairman's skill that this was done without apparent difficulty, and the vote of thanks which followed was unusually well-deserved.

Mr. Revie must also have felt rewarded by the resulting lively and, in some cases, healthily-bitter arguments in which many members took part. A chief librarian present spoke so eloquently in favour of complete amalgamation, interpreted by him as total absorption of the L.A. by the A.A.L., as almost to arouse suspicion!

The three chief advantages of the scheme appeared to be :

(1) The value of concerted action on the part of a *United Library Association*, comparable with that of the N.U.T., Medical Association, etc.

(2) The re-planning of regional professional organization, including provision of such in the six counties where none already exists.

(3) Regional Representation on the Council.

The criticisms expressed during the evening's proceedings were as follows :

(1) The impossibility, under the present L.A. Constitution, of each member having a vote, either in person or by proxy, on any contentious matter brought before an Annual Meeting.

(2) The apparent disappearance of provision for the education of junior members.

(3) The possibility of a substantial increase in examination fees and subscriptions.

(4) The self-repression of junior members at meetings owing to the presence of their chiefs.

Mr. Revie replied to the questions raised, and assured the meeting that a Students' Section could be formed if the newly-constituted Association did not meet requirements, especially as the Amalgamation Scheme would perpetuate the government of the Association by its younger members.

A memorable evening concluded with an expression of sincere thanks to

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Mr. H. M. Cashmore, City Librarian, Birmingham, for his extreme kindness in continuing to provide accommodation for so many meetings during each year.

M. G. B.

## NEW MEMBERS

**C**ENTRAL ASSOCIATION.—Alice M. Ashe, Mary E. Grinham, Elizabeth Ralph (Bristol); Janet M. Brown (B.B.C.); J. G. Chope (25 Coram St., W.C.1); E. J. Coates (Merton and Morden); C. Roberts Ellis (Surrey County, Kingston); Grace E. Forsyth (Sidcup); A. J. T. Fransella (Harlesden); H. C. Hallett (Mitcham); M. S. Kelly (Belfast); Charles E. King (Exeter); Miss I. R. King (Maldens and Coombe); Sylvia L. Moss (Surbiton); Miss M. Oreilly (Weston-super-Mare); Basil E. Q. Smith (Richmond); Alice M. C. Thompson (Associated Press); Ethel E. Waite (Chelsea).

*Midland.*—Miss I. F. Barrett (Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham); M. J. Crossley (Kidderminster); Miss B. Brazier, L. Davies, M. G. Rathbone, A. Rooke, Miss A. M. Lowe, Miss M. Wrigley (Birmingham); Kenneth F. Stanesby (Burton-on-Trent); Miss L. E. Esplin (Staffs County); Miss M. B. Hartland (Dudley).

*North-Western.*—T. Ashworth (Bolton); Freda Bowler (Stockport); Ruth Sproston (Northwich).

*South Wales.*—Mary C. Power (Cathays Branch, Cardiff); John H. Williams (Cardiff Central).

*South-Western.*—J. E. L. Brice (Poole).

*Yorkshire.*—Ronald E. Birkett (East Riding County); Miss B. M. Cass (University College, Hull); Miss L. Mountain, Miss O. H. Thomas (Sheffield); Miss S. M. Ponsonby (Hull).

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